



ACCOUNTABILITY BRIEF

February, 2001

An Overview of Alternative Education in Nevada

In Nevada, alternative education programs serve two primary purposes: to serve students at risk of dropping out of school and to provide alternative placements for disruptive students. In compliance with Assembly Bill 521, a recent Nevada Department of Education document provides an overview of established alternative education programs in Nevada from site visits, surveys of charter schools, interviews and from local school district plans submitted to the superintendent of public instruction. The following highlights were noted.

- The need for alternative services continues to grow due to population growth, demographic diversification, a strong service economy, school violence, higher academic standards, and the advent of distance learning and virtual classrooms.
- Alternative education programs compete for funds and facilities with other district programs and expenses since funding for alternative education is determined at the local level.
- Many of the referred students have low academic skill levels, as witnessed in norm-referenced testing results in reading, language, mathematics, and science.
- The main characteristics of the targeted student populations for both regular alternative education programs and many charter schools are credit deficiency, chronic absence, special needs, and behavioral issues.
- Attributes of most alternative education programs and charter schools' program elements are the provision of curriculum directed toward achieving a standard and/or an adult diploma, voluntary activity credit, correspondence credit and independent study, non-standard (school) day schedule, and behavior management and improvement programs.
- Other attributes noted are computer-based curriculum, non-standard school year, community college credit, and, on rarer occasions, transportation and childcare.
- Support services range from none to multiple, depending on the size of the program as well as the creativity and commitment of the staff.
- Although some of the teachers in alternative programs may have experience working with at-risk students, none of the programs require specific training and most are unable to provide professional development in this area.
- Not all smaller programs can provide instruction from certified teachers in all of the core areas.

The following recommendations are made in the document.

- Professional development opportunities specific to teaching at-risk students should be available to all instructors in alternative education programs.
- Behavioral management skills should be a prerequisite for teachers in these programs.
- Sufficient funds should be allocated to ensure alternative education program facilities, equipment, and materials are up to date and that adequate counseling and support services are available.
- Further evaluation of alternative education programs and structured behavioral programs should be conducted to determine best practices.

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